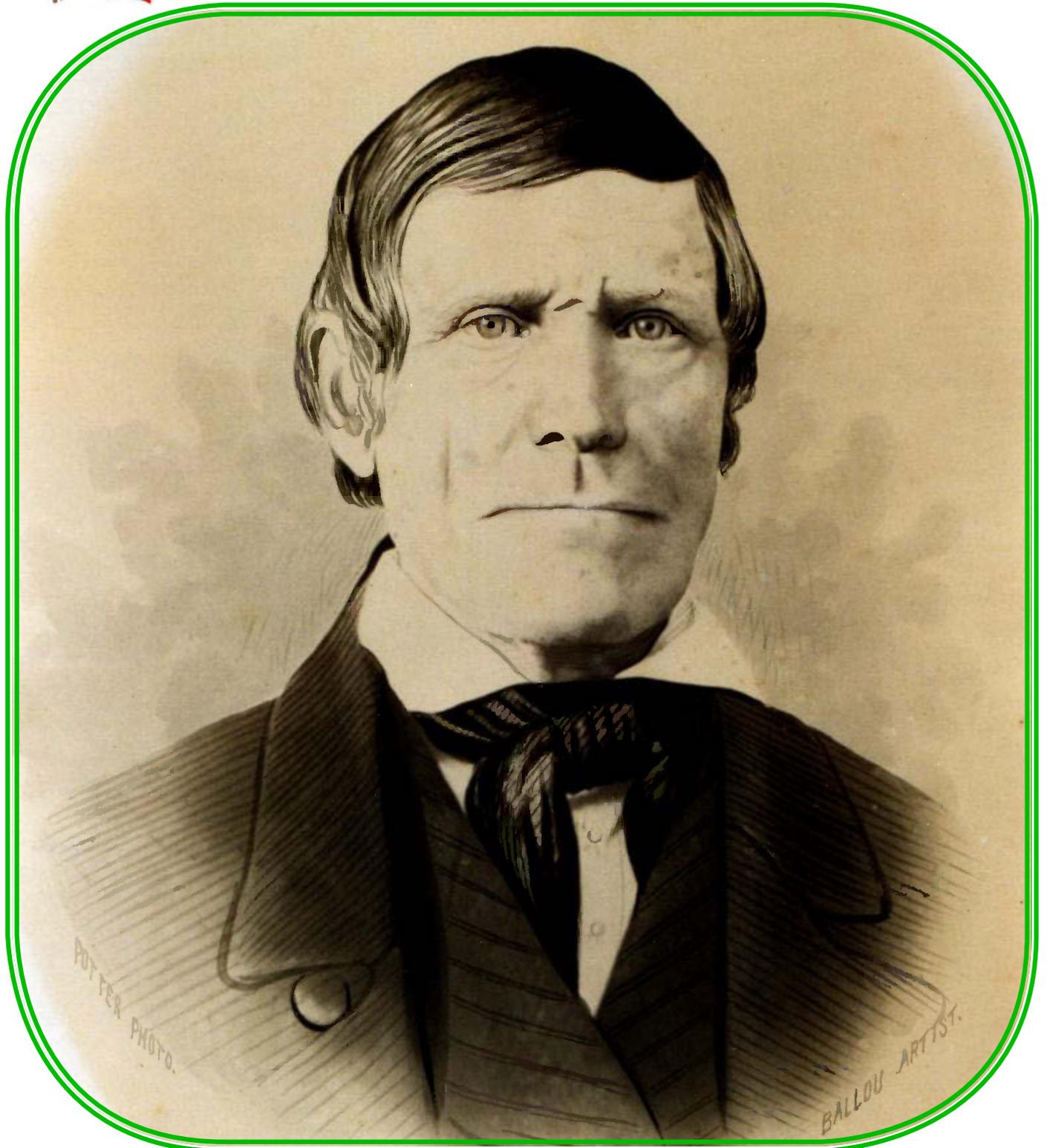


# THE VILLAGE PIONEER

*Journal of the Sheffield Village Historical Society*



*SEASON'S GREETINGS*



*Captain Aaron Root (1801-1865)—Sheffield's Heroic Mariner. This issue commemorates the life of Captain Root.*

## Captain Aaron Root

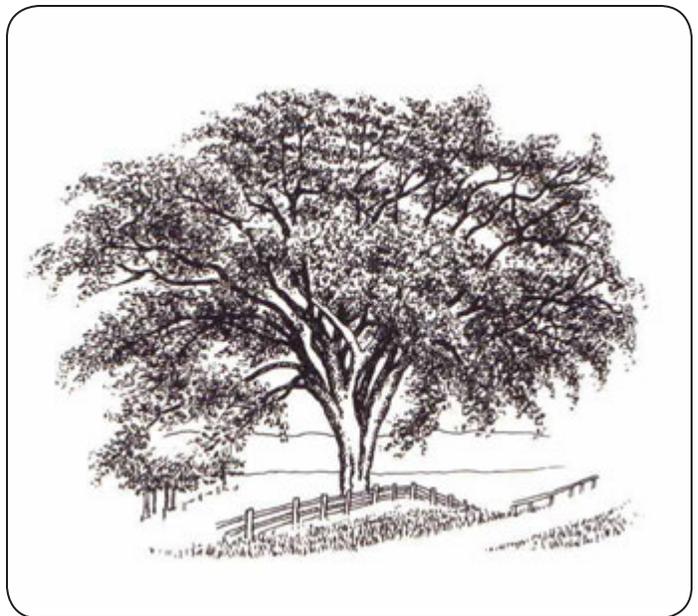
Captain Aaron Root was perhaps the most adventurous of the early pioneers to settle in Sheffield, Ohio. He was a mariner of *derring-do* whose exploits ranged from carrying runaway slaves over Lake Erie to braving North Atlantic storms on a voyage from the Black River to Liverpool, England and return. Aaron was born in Sheffield, Massachusetts on August 29, 1801, grandson of Revolutionary War veteran, Colonel Aaron Root. In the spring of 1816, as a boy of 14, he journeyed from the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts with his parents, Henry and Mary (Day) Root, and five younger siblings to be the first family to settle in Sheffield, Ohio.

**Colonel Aaron Root (1720-1809).** Aaron's grandfather and namesake, Colonel Aaron Root (1720-1809) was himself a remarkable man. He was born on December 20, 1720 in Westfield, Massachusetts and settled at Sheffield, Massachusetts in 1743 with his brother Colonel Azariah Root, just 10 years after the community [originally known as Poontoosick] was founded. Both men rose to the rank of colonel in the Massachusetts Militia during the Revolutionary War. Aaron survived the war, whereas Azariah died in the service on July 3, 1777 after contracting smallpox introduced by the British.

Aaron married Rhoda King on September 8, 1748 and they had three children, Thaddeus and Lurania, twins born in 1754, and Rhoda, born four years later. Thaddeus and Rhoda died in 1833, but the date of Lurania's passing is unknown. Rhoda King's grandfather, Matthew Noble, was the first settler of Sheffield. After the death of Rhoda, Aaron's first wife in ~1760, he wed Jerusha Steele (1746-1788), a descendent of Governor William Bradford, leader of the *Mayflower* Pilgrim colony at Plymouth. Aaron and Jerusha had five children: Ashbell (1764-1810), Henry (1767-1829), Jerusha (1769-pre 1800), Anna (1770-1811), and Mary (1773-1859).

A man of many accomplishments, Colonel Root managed his beef, dairy, and sheep farm, operated a tannery, held offices in the Congregational Society, served on the Sheffield School Committee, and was elected to the Board of Selectmen, in turn serving as the board's overseer of roads and fences, scaler of leather, treasurer, and moderator. He built a large frame home, known as the *1750 House*, opposite the *Great Elm*, a tree that was made famous in the writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes [*The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*, published in 1858 by *The Atlantic Monthly Press*, New York]. The *Great Elm*, which grew to a height of 82 feet, a limb

spread of 108 feet, and a circumference of 20 feet, finally yielded to the ravages of time and was cut down in 1926 at an estimated age of 400 years. The *Great Elm* has been immortalized by its representation on the Sheffield town seal with the inscription, "He who plants a tree plants hope." The *1750 House* is also noteworthy for its secret staircase used to hide wounded Continental Army soldiers during the Revolutionary War. Later, in the Civil War era, the *1750 House* was a stop for escaping slaves on the underground railway. The house still stands in Sheffield on South Main Street, serving in recent years as a fine antique shop and residence.



*The Great Elm, Sheffield, Massachusetts, once located across the road from the 1750 House (courtesy of Sheffield Historical Society).*



*The 1750 House in Sheffield, Massachusetts. This early Berkshire County home was constructed by Colonel Aaron Root (1720-1809), grandfather of Captain Aaron Root of Sheffield, Ohio (courtesy of Sheffield Historical Society).*



*Berkshire Mountains of Sheffield, Massachusetts (painting by William Watson 1993).*

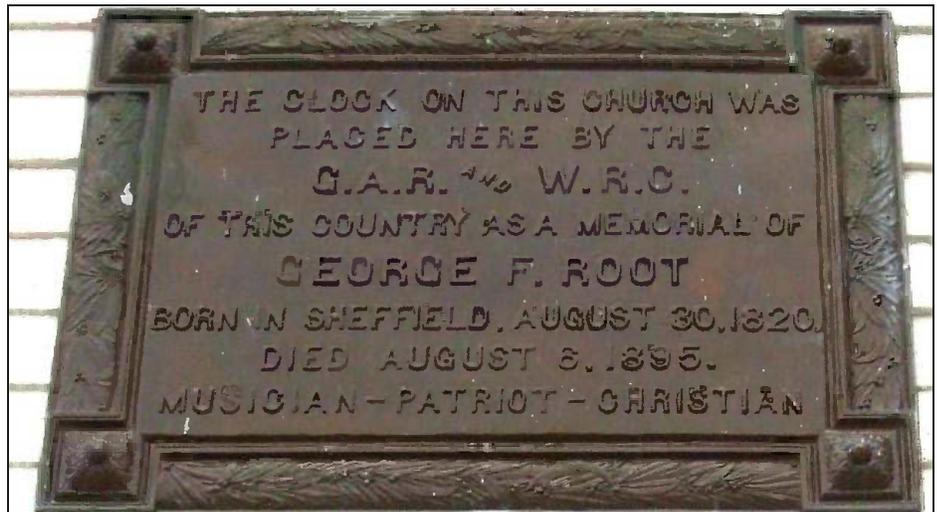
As a Major in the Massachusetts Militia Aaron Root drilled volunteers in the town's parkway, knowing that a revolution was close at hand. In 1773, he was a signatory to a letter of grievances to the King of England known as the *Sheffield Declaration*. This precursor to the *Declaration of Independence* was also signed by other Sheffield notables, including Captain William Day and Colonel Ashley. During the War for Independence, as a Colonel, Aaron continued to train troops and was in charge of providing assistance to the families of soldiers. In 1785, as a member of the committee to introduce smallpox vaccinations to Sheffield, he bravely volunteered to be among the first to receive an inoculation. Colonel Root died on his farm in 1809, at age 88.

Another member of the Root family—a grand nephew of Colonel Root—Professor George Frederick Root also had a noteworthy career. Born in Sheffield, Massachusetts in 1820, he moved to Chicago where he prospered as an eminent musician. He is most remembered for composing stirring Civil War anthems in support of the Union war effort, including the *Battle Cry of Freedom*; *Just Before the Battle, Mother*; *Tramp! Tramp! Tramp!*, and *The Vacant Chair*.

The clock in the tower of the Old Parish Church in Sheffield is a memorial to the composer, where a brass plate commemorates his accomplishments.



Clock tower of the Old Parish Church (First Congregational), Sheffield, Massachusetts (erected in 1760); parish organized in 1735.



Memorial plaque on Old Parish Church for George Frederick Root (1820-1895).

**Henry Root (1767-1829).** Henry, the eldest son of Colonel Aaron and Jerusha (Steele) Root and father of Captain Aaron Root, married Mary Day, daughter of Captain William Day, on September 10, 1800 in Sheffield, Massachusetts where they had six children: Aaron (1801-1865), William Henry (1803-1889), Julia Ann (1805-1869, married Norman Day in 1830), Jane (1807-?, married H. Austin of Monroe, Michigan), Frances (1809-1862), and Mary (1811-1859, married Almon R. Fitzgerald).

In 1815, Henry purchased Lot 17 in what was to become Sheffield Township from his brother-in-law Captain John Day, and Jabez Burrell. In February of 1816, Henry, Mary and the children began their journey overland to Ohio, arriving in early April. They settled at Lot 17 on French Creek near the present Abbe Road bridge.

Henry's son and younger brother of Aaron, William Henry Root, published several accounts of the family's journey to Ohio. The party of eight encountered few serious hardships on the trip, but twice their wagons had to be driven through swollen streams where horses, family possessions and even lives were at stake. *We had two wagons, one driven by a yoke of oxen with a horse ahead known in England as a spike team, the other wagon was drawn by bay horses.* Aaron and William were not content to ride in the wagon, and walked alongside their father most of the way. Bridges west of Buffalo were nonexistent and when they reached the Rocky River it had to be crossed without the benefit of a ferry. Rocky River at that time was four or five feet deep and had a strong current. Without mishap the Root family crossed the river, but then encountered another problem—the almost vertical wall of shale on the west bank of the river had to be surmounted. Once the family finally fought to the top of the bluff, the remainder of the trip to the Black River seemed easy. Henry described the area east of the Black River as wild country with bottomless roads of mud in places. Road conditions were bad everywhere and in some places it took the Root family a whole day to travel a distance of only four miles. During his travel William marked down interesting statistics along the way. He noted that the bustling city of Albany, New York had a population of 7,000; Buffalo was a town of 200 or 300 people; other communities such as Erie, Pennsylvania and Cleveland were even smaller.

The following excerpt from William's recollections was published in the August 27, 1889 entry for the Annual Picnic of The Day-Austin-Root August Reunions.

*On the 15th day of February 1816, a canvas-covered wagon was started to the land of promise to all New Englanders, the Connecticut Western Reserve. Inside that wagon were his father and mother [Henry and Mary Root]; aged between forty-five and fifty, and their six children aged between four and fifteen. It was a sad parting from a pleasant home and from kindred and friends, to enter upon a difficult journey and the privations and hardships of pioneer life.*

*The travelers reached Albany, New York, on the third day, thence up the beautiful Mohawk Valley to Utica, thence by slow stages to Buffalo. West of Buffalo they found no*

bridges and forded the streams swollen by spring freshets or were ferried over in scows. The mother fed her family from the "provision chest" carried in the wagon and made their beds at night with the bedding they brought with them. In due time they reach a small village called Cleveland, six miles north of the village of Newburg. At Dover they found a few families, among whom was the first settler of that town, Joseph Cahoon, who came there October 10th, 1810. It was a journey of peril and hardship, the last nine miles the hardest of all. On the 1st of April 1816, after six weeks' travel, they reached Black River.

To the boy who had not yet seen his thirteenth year [William Henry Root], the broad blue lake, the majestic forests, the wild, strange scenes were like a story of romance. He helped clear the forests and make the home and grew strong and stalwart. For seventy-three years from that April morning when he first saw the sunrise over Lake Erie he had an active part in the changes, which transformed the forest into fruitful fields and happy homes. The story of those seventy-three years is too long and too full of incidents to be told in this brief sketch. It must suffice to say that Mr. Root was a courteous, Christian gentleman. The home, which he made for himself and family by Sheffield Lake embowered in trees of his own planting, was the abode of a generous hospitality. It will ever awaken pleasant memories in many minds.

Once the Roots arrived in Sheffield, Ohio in early April 1816, they set about doing what was essential to survive in the wilderness. William Henry Root again recorded his impression of this new land. He noted that the land, in its primitive state was very heavily timbered. Much of the bottom land along the Black River was covered with an immense growth of timber, and much of this timber was entangled with grape vines. In the mid-summer, a luxurious growth of herbaceous plants was in many places higher than a man's head.

The Big Bottom, the low flood plain of the Black River near its junction with French Creek, contained over 200 acres of prime farmland. On the bottom was the largest and best sugar bush [natural grove

of sugar maples] in the region, one that had been used by the Indians. The scars on the maple trees gave the appearance that the trees had been tapped for a long time, perhaps 50 to 100 years. Some of the noble old maple trees were four feet through at the ground with huge tops to match.

Corn had also been raised on the Big Bottom before any white settlers arrived. Here the Indians had made sugar, caught

River near the mills. The trip was an all-day ride, requiring a night out in the woods.

After purchasing a grist of corn, the Roots would return home the next day. The family's first barrel of flour came from Huron at a cost of \$16. The flour was poured into sacks and brought home on horseback. Henry bought a cow and a calf soon after the family arrived. The family lived on one-half of the milk she gave the



French Creek near its confluence with the Black River. A French trading house was located here in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. An Archaic Indian camp was once located on top of the bluff.

fish, grew corn, hunted wild game, and bartered fur skins with French traders near the mouth of French Creek. Brothers Aaron and William explored the dilapidated remains of a French trading house at the confluence. William learned that the Indians had left this country as the War of 1812 broke out; consequently no traders remained in 1816.

The first thing that needed to be done when the Roots reached their new homeland was to provide something for the family to eat and food for the stock. Their animals were turned out to graze on the Big Bottom, the grasses being up enough even in early April. Henry and his older boys made the trip on horseback to Hadley's mills on the Rocky River in Columbia to fetch corn. The route was up French Creek, past Wilbur Cahoon's homestead and along Stoney Ridge to Ridgeville Center; thence easterly on South Ridge Road [Butternut Ridge] to Chester Beebe's place, where a turn to the south through the woods came out at Rocky

first summer and the other half supported the calf. They found that it was important to keep the calf so that the cow would come home at night.

The best fishing ground on the river was at the upper end of the Big Bottom. Pioneer families gathered here to lay in a year's supply of this almost indispensable food. The fish were taken at night. Henry and his sons each had a spear and a torch. The torches were made of hickory bark tied in two or three places with elm saplings to keep the bark in place. Henry served as captain of his group of fishermen. When he would give the orders, "come out in the water and light your torches," the boys would instantly obey. Pike were the principle fish caught on the rapids, along with mullet [redhorse], suckers, and sheepshead. The fish were very abundant. One night Aaron (age 14) and William (age 12) took 40 large spawning pike before midnight. An expert fisherman could take as many as 100 in a single night.

Salt was necessary to preserve the fish, but salt was scarce and costly. The first barrel purchased by the Roots cost \$14. Thus, to economize they used the sun to dry the fish after lightly salting it. The salted fish were placed on a rack of wood poles and a slow fire was built under them so that the smoke would keep flies from gathering. Once properly cured, pike was an excellent tasting fish, resembling codfish and prepared for the table in the same manner.

The Root family's clothing was mostly made from flax and wool raised on their farm and manufactured by the women of the family. Everyday wear was almost exclusively homemade. Thus, a portion of the cloth, both linen and woolen, that was worn by the ladies was little different in design from that worn by the men. The women had to use

ingenuity to weave *fancy articles* from the different colors of yarns brought to them to be woven. Various colors were produced by making dyes from tree bark with a little alum from the shale beds along the river to set the color. Cloth for a calico dress could be obtained by exchanging homespun cloth at a ratio of 2-to-1 with a local merchant. Leather shoes and boots were a great luxury and the Root children rarely indulged in such footwear. After cattle began to multiply in Sheffield and after tanners and carriers established themselves here, leather goods became more plentiful and better foot protection was available.



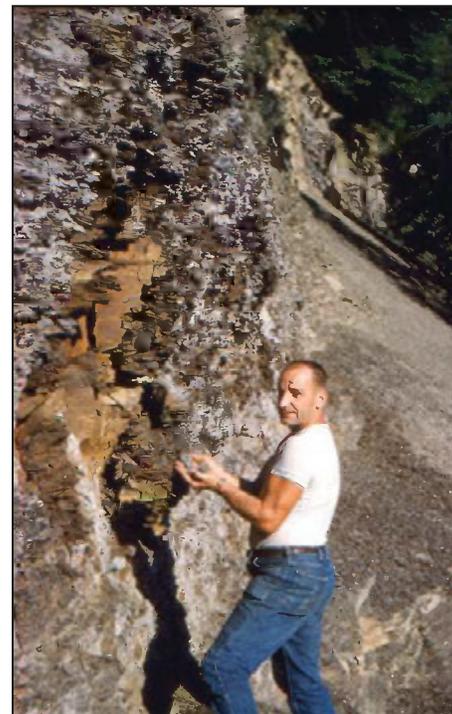
Big Bottom flats (left) in the Black River valley.



Rapids at the upstream end of the Big Bottom where Henry Root and his sons would fish for pike.



Shale bluffs along the Black River in Sheffield. Note the white alum deposits in the bedrock (right). Close-up view of the alum deposits in the Ohio Shale formation (left), which forms bluffs surrounding the Big Bottom. This bedrock was deposited as silt in the bottom of a Devonian Sea some 350 million years ago. Alum was used with natural dyes to fix the colors in handspun fabrics.



**Mary (Day) Root (1772-1856).** Mary Day, Captain Aaron Root's mother, also came from a family of military heroes. Her father, Captain William Day (1715-1797), spent much of his life at sea and, in his latter years, lived with his children in Sheffield, Massachusetts. For many years he was engaged in seafaring and had command of several vessels. As such, his life was filled with stirring events and thrilling adventures. During the French and Indian War (1752-1763), the American phase of the worldwide war fought between France and Great Britain for control of the vast colonial territory of North America, William Day commanded naval vessels in the service of the British Crown—he held his commission as Captain under the King of England. His ship was captured at one point and he was taken as prisoner to France where he was detained for two years. When released, he pleaded the privilege of taking his old boots with him, which was granted—unknown to the grantors, the boot heels were filled with gold guineas [a gold coin first minted in 1663 equivalent to £1.05 or 21 shillings].

On his return to England in 1760, William Day was given command of another warship. He handpicked a fine crew to sail against the enemy. In the Bay of Biscay his frigate encountered a fleet of five French ships. The lead French ship, commanded by an Admiral, was larger than Day's frigate and considerably in advance of the other vessels in the fleet. Captain Day engaged and captured the Admiral's ship before the others caught up. With neither vessel being much injured, Captain Day divided his force with the captured ship. He attacked the remaining ships of the French fleet with such spirit that they all surrendered and he was able to bring them safely into Plymouth Harbor, England. The British Admiralty honored Captain Day for his bravery and achievement in capturing the French fleet by commissioning a painting of him on the deck of his ship by noted Boston artist, John Singleton Copley (1737-1815). Copley spent much of his life in London and some of his most celebrated portraits are of the English Royal family. His *Siege of Gibraltar* hangs in Guildhall, London's historic council hall, the foundation of which was laid in 1411.

As another sidelight, it is interesting to note that while Captain William Day was fighting the French in Europe, Captain James Cook, the famed explorer/navigator of the South Pacific a decade later, was using his cartographic skills to map the boulder-strewn bed of the St. Lawrence River in preparation for General James Wolfe's successful invasion of French Quebec and capture of Montreal. Working under the range of French guns, often at night, Cook charted and buoyed a safe passage through the treacherous maze of rocks, shoals, and shifting sandbars. In June 1759, the entire British armada of over 200 ships made the crossing



*Captain William Day (1772-1856), father of Mary (Day) Root, while serving as commander of a British ship captured a French Admiral and four of his ships in 1760. This portrait, believed to have been painted by noted artist John Singleton Copley, was commissioned by the British Admiralty to depict Captain Day and the fleet he captured (courtesy of Mildred Clough).*

without a single casualty, earning Cook the designation as *Master Surveyor* which greatly influenced his selection as commander of the Pacific Expedition in 1768.

When ashore, William Day made his home at Sheffield in Berkshire County, Massachusetts. Soon after the hostilities ended, he retired from the sea and settled in Sheffield with his third wife, Rhoda Hubbell of Litchfield, Connecticut. Captain Day was an active patriot in the American Revolution and participated in town affairs until his death in 1797 at age 82. William and Rhoda had five children there, one of which—James (1780-?) also had a naval career and two of which—Mary (Day) Root (1772-1856) and Captain John Day (1774-1827)—journeyed to Ohio with their families in 1816, founding the community of Sheffield in the Black River valley.

Mary Day's brother, Captain James Day, served in the War of 1812. Like his father William, James won fame in naval warfare. While in command of an American vessel, he was pursued by an overpowering British squadron in Long Point Sound. Rather than surrender his ship and be captured, he ran his vessel upon the rocks at Point Judith, escaping to fight another day. After the war, James lived for a while with his brother John in Sheffield, Massachusetts.

Mary Day's other brother, Captain John Day, also a veteran of the War of 1812 purchased a tract with Jabez Burrell then known as Township 7, Range 17 of the Connecticut Western Reserve from General William Hart in January 1815. General Hart had purchased the tract from the Connecticut Land Company three years earlier, but had never visited Ohio.

After persuading several other Berkshire friends to share in the purchase with them, in June of that year Burrell and Day came by horseback to explore the Township and select lots for themselves and friends, returning home before autumn. A year later, on July 27, 1816 Captain John Day and his family arrived at their destination in Ohio after a journey in covered wagons for more than three weeks.

Mary (Day) Root had some interesting experiences during her pioneer days in Sheffield while young Aaron was growing up. Just a few months after her arrival in Ohio, on July 27, 1816 Mary Root had the pleasure of welcoming to her rude home her brother, Captain John Day, his wife Lydia Austin, and their nine children, to her limited quarters. An account of Mary's experiences in early Sheffield was written by her niece, Eleanor (Day) Austin, in 1896 and published in *Memorial to Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*. The following excerpt gives insight to the lives of the first settlers:

*Just think of it, ye women who are so disturbed over an extra lodger! One room, and already occupied by a family of eight, then put eleven more in it! You can't see how they managed it, did you say: No, of course you can't. Mind you, both of these women came from large and commodious homes.*

*Thus the early women began their pioneer lessons. These crowded cabins were the primary schools of a good-natured, getting-along-some-how that fused them at once into a common family, as it were, with a community of interests and labors, which begot in them a mutual regard, friendliness, and hospitality that ever remained a pleasant characteristic of the society of olden days. From time to time the Sisterhood of Pioneers was enlarged by fresh arrivals. Thus by 1818 about ten families with the ten young men that came, who all married and settled in town, strictly speaking, constituted the pioneers of Sheffield.*

*They were all, or nearly all New England women of the better class, and of strong Puritan principles, well fitted by their firm adherence to principle and upright lives, to leave an impress in the right direction on the new community. One of their sons says of them: "Whatever of moral and religious principles hangs about the native population of Sheffield, is due to the influence of pious pioneer mothers. They were*

*truly a noble band of self-sacrificing, duty-doing, God-fearing women, whom we, their descendants, delight to honor and call blessed.*

*Mrs. Henry Root, one day, while busily engaged in household duties, heard a great outcry from the pig yard. A pig was squealing most pitifully. She dropped everything, and seizing the broom, a woman's weapon, she rushed out to find a bear carrying off a pig. He had got it to the fence and was trying to get it over, when lo! a woman appeared on the scene furiously brandishing her broom and shouting at the top of her voice. Such surprising attentions from a woman so disconcerted Bruin that he left at once and Mrs. Root saved her pig.*

*But she was not so fortunate when a pack of wolves went for the calf; for, although she made noise enough to raise the "Seven Sleepers," she could not get in her broom work, as it was in the night and the poor calf had to go.*

*The story of Peter Miller and the bear, which is found in McGuffey's reader, I think, transpired in this town. This event has always been the bear story (par excellence) of Sheffield. Then there were the rattlesnakes, another deadly foe, to contend with. If one of these crossed their pathway the pioneer women did not scream and runaway, but killed it. One woman, on her way visiting, killed one, then took her scissors and cut off its head and buried it to prevent some barefooted boy from stepping one it and getting poisoned.*

*Mrs. Henry Root [Mary Day] was a woman of strong character and marked ability, a teacher in her younger days, possessed of a rare fund of incidents and anecdotes of travel in foreign countries, being a daughter of a sea captain of world-wide experiences. She was of a very social nature, and old and young alike always enjoyed her company. She lived to be eighty-seven [sic eighty-three] years old.*



Henry Root Homestead on Lot 17, Sheffield, Ohio. Constructed in the early 1800s, this now dilapidated Greek Revival-style farmhouse was Aaron Root's home until the mid 1800s. The house and associated barn is located on the southwest corner of Abbe Road and Colorado Avenue.

**Captain Aaron Root (1801-1865).** After arriving in Sheffield, Ohio in the spring of 1816, Aaron and his brother William helped their father clear trees from the French Creek valley for crops and to construct a log house and barn. At an early age Aaron became enraptured with boats and navigation on Lake Erie. In 1818 he watched with excitement as his cousin James Day built the first boat on the Black River, the *General Huntington*. Named for a Revolutionary War general, this 52-foot long wood sloop had two masts and a cargo capacity of 50 tons (Weisman 2004). Soon Aaron became an apprentice on Great Lakes ships and within a decade he was owner and master of his own vessels. The table below lists the Great Lakes vessels associated with Captain Aaron Root, including what is known about these ships and his involvement with them:

**Great Lakes Vessels Owned or Operated  
by Aaron Root of Sheffield, Ohio**

Position	Vessel	Type	Years	Comment
Owner	<i>Beaver</i>	schooner	1828-1830	details unknown
Captain & Owner	<i>Young Amaranth</i>	schooner	1829-1831	maiden season—1825
Builder	<i>Sheldon Thompson</i>	sidewheel steamer	1830	maiden season—1830
Captain	<i>Nehemiah Hubbard</i>	schooner	1833	details unknown
Captain & Owner	<i>Florida</i>	brig	1834	maiden season—1834
Captain & Owner	<i>North America</i>	?	1835?	maiden season—1834
Captain & Owner	<i>North Carolina</i>	brig	1835-1838	maiden season—1835
Captain	<i>Bunker Hill</i>	sidewheel steamer	1837	maiden season—1837
Captain	<i>Lexington</i>	sidewheel steamer	1838-1839	maiden season—1838
Captain	<i>Palestine</i>	schooner	1847	maiden season—1847
Captain & Owner	<i>Henry Clay</i>	propeller steamer	1849-1851	maiden season—1849
Captain & Owner	<i>Wm. S. Pierson</i>	bark	1859-1860	maiden season—1859

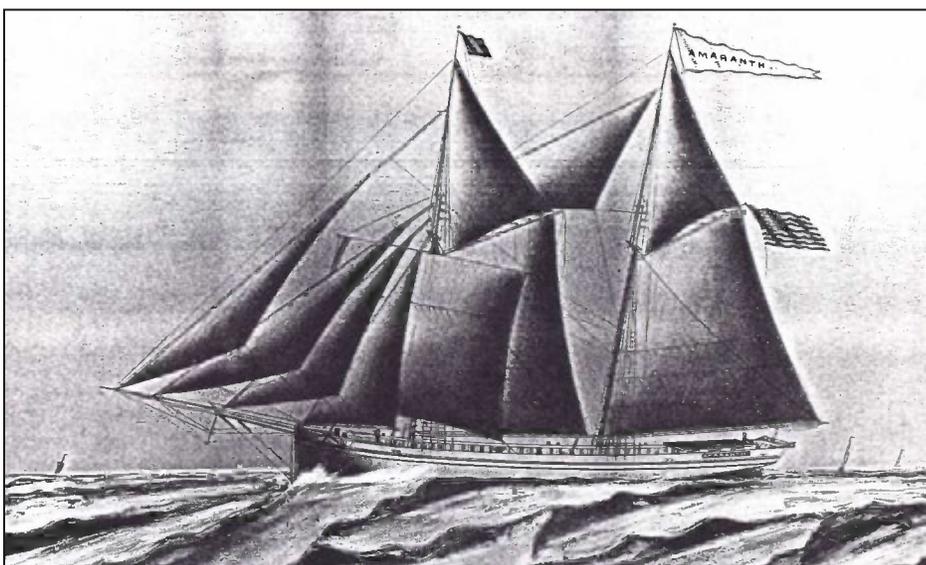
**Beaver**—This wooden schooner [a sailing ship with two or more masts, typically with the foremast smaller than the mainmast and fore-and-aft-rigged sails lengthwise to the vessel] was likely the first vessel owned by Captain Aaron Root. Little is known of her dimensions or history, other than her first U.S. maritime enrollment by Capt. Root was July 4, 1828 and the last was June 14, 1830. He listed her homeport as Buffalo, New York. The *Beaver* is believed to have been built at a port other than Black River (now Lorain).

**Young Amaranth**—This wooden sailing ship was built by James Day and Fairbanks Church at Black River, Ohio in 1825. She was only the third vessel to be built along the Black River at what is now Lorain, Ohio. This vessel was 67.2 feet in length, 19.5 feet in beam, an 5.8 feet in depth. She was first owned by Judah W. Ransom of Sandusky, Ohio. Four years after she was built, Captain Aaron Root a distant cousin of James Day, purchased this two-masted, 67.4-ton schooner and operated her for several years in the late 1820s and early 1830s. Ruth Jackson, a widow from Providence, Rhode Island traveling with her two young children, booked passage in 1830 aboard the schooner *Young Amaranth* en route from Buffalo to Lorain.

She noted in her diary that, “Capt. Aaron Root is a gracious and able master of the vessel.” In 1831 Ruth Jackson became the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mrs. Youngs L. Morgan in Cleveland. In October 1833 the schooners *Young Amaranth*, *Bolivar*, and *Recovery* were damaged during a storm on Lake Erie. Over the course of her life the *Young Amaranth* is believed to have had six owners, but her final disposition is unknown.



Grain schooner of the type operated by Captain Aaron Root on the Great Lakes in the 1830s (courtesy of Chicago Historical Society).



Lake Erie schooner Amaranth, typical of the type of vessels built at Black River in the 1820s and 1830s. Schooners such as this one were the first vessels on which Captain Aaron Root served as master (courtesy of the Great Lakes Historical Society).



*Milan ship basin in 1847 depicting grain being transported to Great Lakes schooners (courtesy of Milan Historical Society). Captain Root served as shipwright here in the late 1840s, building the steamer Erie.*

**Sheldon Thompson**—Captains F. Church and Aaron Root are on record as having built the first steamer at Huron, Ohio in 1830. This port was the most prolific builder of Great Lakes steamboats in the decade of the 1830s. The **Sheldon Thompson** a 123-foot, 241-ton, schooner-rigged wooden, sidewheel steamer was built at a cost of \$16,000. Twelve other Huron-built steamers would follow her in the next 25 years, but only the **Sheldon Thompson** was associated with Captain Root. It is unclear if he served as master of this vessel, but in 1832 she was chartered by the U.S. Army for service in the Black Hawk War.

General Winfield Scott, his staff, and 220 troops steamed out of Buffalo harbor in early July and steamed across Lake Erie en route for Chicago and Black Hawk's stronghold in western Illinois and Wisconsin. Unseen, an enemy far more potent than Black Hawk's warriors had also come aboard the ship—Asiatic cholera. As the vessel steamed toward Detroit the epidemic struck and by the time she had crossed Lake Huron 88 men had died and their corpses were weighted and thrown overboard. When the ship finally dropped anchor at Chicago, 16 more bodies were committed to the deep. In the clear Lake Michigan water the bodies were so visible that Captain Augustus Walker was obliged

to change his anchorage to save the crew from anguish.

On November 11, 1835, the **Sheldon Thompson** was tied up in the Buffalo River alongside the sidewheel steamer **Henry Clay** when a hurricane force storm on Lake Erie drove a surge of water up the river, raising its level 20 feet. The vessels were cast high out of the water onto the wharf. The **Henry Clay** was a total loss. The **Sheldon Thompson** was repaired, but by 1838 she was worn out and scrapped.

**Nehemiah Hubbard**—This wooden schooner was the fourth Great Lakes vessel associated with Captain Aaron Root. He served as her master in 1833. Enrollment records for that year list Cleveland as homeport for the **Nehemiah Hubbard**. This vessel is believed to have been built at a port other than Black River.

**Florida**—This wooden brig [abbreviation for brigantine—a two-masted, square-rigged sailing ship with an additional gaff sail on the mainmast] was built by Augustus Jones at Black River in 1834. Originally a shipbuilder from Connecticut, Augustus Jones lost his ships when they were burned by the British in the Connecticut River during the War of 1812. As compensation, he was granted a tract of land on the Black River in Ohio where he established his shipyard. The 158-ton **Florida** was 85 feet in length, 23 feet in beam, and 9 feet in

depth. Captain Aaron Root was owner and master of this vessel during her maiden season. Seven years later, under another master, the **Florida** was driven ashore in a Lake Michigan storm near St. Joseph, Michigan.

**North America**—This 361-ton, wooden vessel was built in Conneaut, Ohio in 1834 and is believed to have been owned by Captain Aaron Root in 1835. The U.S. maritime enrollment records for that year list him as owner and captain with Cleveland as homeport. There is some confusion about type of vessel in that some enrollment records list her as a brig and others as a sidewheel steamer. The dimensions and history of this vessel are unknown, other than she was driven onto the beach of Presque Isle at Erie, Pennsylvania in 1835 with Captain Gilman Appleby as master. Prior to going ashore, the **North America** had put out her anchors in an attempt to ride out the gale. The winds increased in fury and soon parted her cables, while the passengers and crew gave themselves up as lost. Captain Appleby decided to scuttle the boat on the beach to prevent her from crashing into the harbor pier. This action is ascribed to saving both lives and the vessel. However, on January 14, 1847 she burned in Conneaut harbor.

Of related interest, in the autumn of 1833 while Captain Appleby was in charge of building the **North America** in Conneaut, his aunt from Buffalo came to visit him and view the new ship under construction. She decided to return home before the new ship was ready to sail, so Captain Appleby booked passage for her on a schooner. On passing Erie a sudden squall struck the ship and rolled her over on her side. She quickly filled with water but continued to float. The crew lowered the vessel's yawl, jumped in, and pulled for the shore, leaving the woman on board, supposing she had drowned.

Three days later when Captain Appleby learned of the incident, he asked Captain Wilkins of the steamer **William Peacock** bound for Buffalo to recover the body of his aunt if he spotted the shipwreck. Captain Wilkins discovered the disabled, still-floating schooner and sent his first mate with some seamen to search onboard for the body. Using a long pike pole they probed every part of the water-filled cabin for a human form; finding none they gave up the search concluding that the body had floated away in the lake.

After another two days, Captain Appleby came alongside with apparatus capable of righting the schooner, intending to tow her back to port. When he had gotten the ship nearly level, a woman appeared walking through the water, coming up the stairs to the deck. Captain Appleby caught his aunt in his arms while her son, who was onboard with him, wept, and sailors screamed with joy and disbelief. For five days and nights she had survived in water up to her armpits with nothing to eat but a solitary cracker and an onion that floated by on the water. She had seen the pole thrust into the cabin by Captain Wilkins' crew, but couldn't reach it when they shouted, "Hold on and be pulled out," and they couldn't hear her cries for help. Everyone agreed that her salvation was little less than a miracle.

**North Carolina**—This hermaphrodite brig [a two-masted sailing vessel with a square-rigged foremast and a mainmast having a fore-and-aft mainsail] was built by Joseph J. Hamblin at Black River, Ohio in 1835. Captain Aaron Root was a partial owner of this wooden brig and served as her master during her maiden season. The dimensions of this vessel are unknown. U.S. maritime enrollment records list Cleveland as her homeport. In August 1837, the brig *North Carolina* capsized on Lake Michigan with the loss of several lives.

**Bunker Hill**—This 457-ton, wooden, sidewheel steamer was built by Frederick Nelson Jones [son of Augustus Jones] at Black River [Charleston, later Lorain] in 1837. She was only the second steamer to be built there [first was *General Gratiot* built by his father Augustus Jones in 1831] and the largest vessel to date. Her dimensions were 154 feet in length, 28 feet in beam, and 11.5 feet in depth. She was one of the early steamers having a cabin on the hurricane deck. She had a 24-foot diameter sidewheel, a cross-head engine, and other machinery manufactured by Warden & Denney in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

During her early years she was in service between Cleveland, Erie, and Buffalo. Captain Aaron Root served as an early master of this vessel, carrying passengers and package freight. Family tradition has it that he also carried runaway slaves to freedom in Canada aboard this ship.

The *Cleveland Herald & Gazette* carried the following maritime notice, *Shipping & Ships*, on April 28, 1837:

*The new steamboat Bunker Hill arrived here yesterday from Charleston [Lorain] where she was built. This craft is of the largest class of lake boats and is intended for carrying of freight. The commander, Capt. Aaron Root of Charleston, is well known as an experienced navigator, who is in every respect qualified for the post. The Bunker Hill is to be assigned to the Buffalo and Clinton lines.*

The *Cleveland Herald & Gazette* carried the following maritime notice, *Shipping & Ships*, on May 8, 1837:

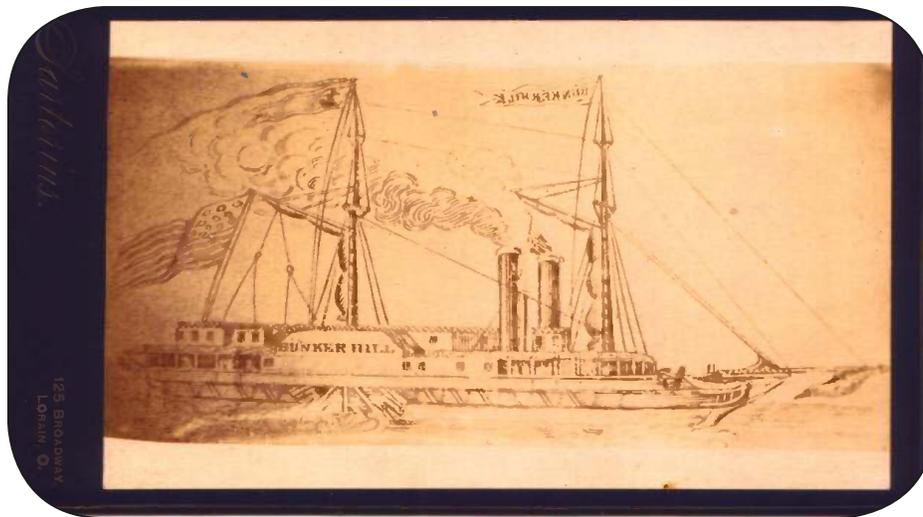
*"The steamboat Bunker Hill, Captain Root, will leave this port for Buffalo May 9, touching at intermediate ports. For freight or passage apply to the captain on board or to R. Winslow and Company, agents."*

The *Bunker Hill* was stranded on Horseshoe Reef in the Niagara River in 1838 and pulled off without serious damage. She continued to carry passengers until about 1841; after that she was used for cargo hauling and towing. In 1846 she collided with the brig *Fashion* off Fairport, Ohio; her bow was stove in and part of

her port wheelhouse and the cabin on the upper deck were ripped off. Nevertheless she took the damaged brig in tow and brought her safely into Fairport harbor. On June 10 1847 the *Bunker Hill* and the twin-screw *Princeton* had a mild collision off Conneaut, Ohio, the vessels receiving only slight damage. Again on June 21, 1847, while entering Sandusky harbor, the *Bunker Hill* and the departing *General Scott* came together with the latter being scratched up somewhat. The final mishap occurred on September 2, 1851 then the *Bunker Hill* burned to the water's edge at Tonawanda, New York, while lying at dock. At the time she was owned by the Cleveland & Tonawanda Co., and was used on the Niagara River in towing vessels upstream to Lake Erie. The cause of the fire is not known and she was uninsured. Captain Root was no longer in command of the vessel when these incidents took place.

**Lexington**—This 354-ton, wooden, sidewheel steamer was built by Frederick Nelson Jones at Black River in 1838. She was 152 feet in length, 21 feet in beam, and 11 feet in depth. U.S. maritime enrollment records show that Captain Aaron Root was master of this vessel in 1838 and 1839. In September 1838 the steamer *Lexington* was disabled on Lake Erie near Buffalo. On June 15, 1850 she was stranded in a storm on Lake Michigan off Port Washington, Wisconsin, and in August of the same year the *Lexington* sank on Lake Erie after colliding with the propeller *Allegheny* near Conneaut, Ohio.

**Palestine**—This vessel was built by Joseph M. Keating at Black River, Ohio in 1847. She was a two-masted, 210-ton wooden schooner of approximately 110 feet in length. Captain Root was her master during her maiden year. On one voyage, he departed Milan, Ohio on August 25, 1847 with a cargo 6,075 bushels of wheat and 540 barrels of flour bound for Buffalo, New York.



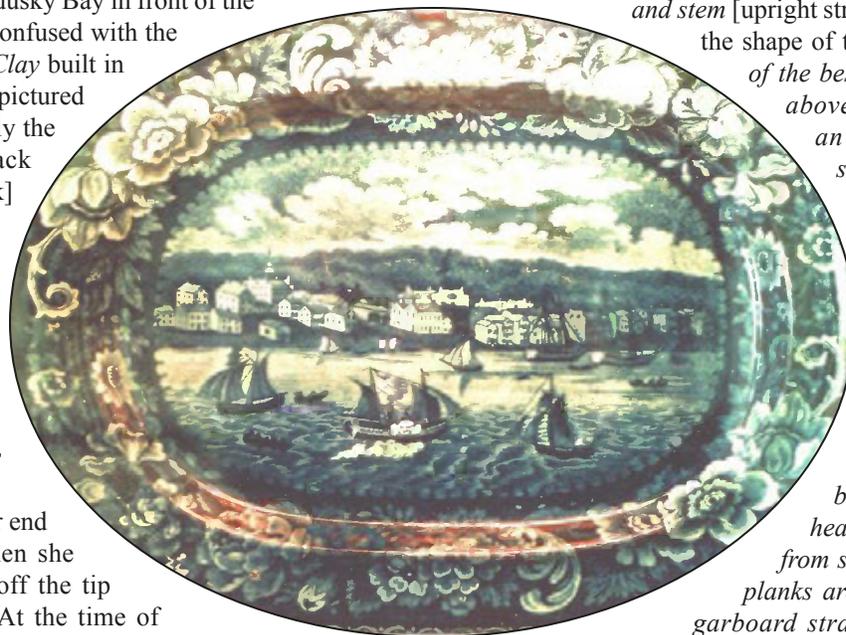
Post card of Captain Aaron Root's sidewheel steamer Bunker Hill, produced by Sartorius, 125 Broadway, Lorain, Ohio.

Six years later, when he was no longer master of the vessel, on November 23, 1853 bound from Kingston, Ontario to Cleveland she ran aground on Braddock's Bay of Lake Ontario near Rochester, New York. She was driven ashore in the storm, pounded by heavy waves, and sank. The plight of the *Palestine* was compounded by erratic variations in her compass that were most likely caused by a cargo of railroad iron. A similarly laden vessel, the *Ontonagon*, also reported compass problems and the two vessels struck the beach only a few yards apart. The railroad iron was salvaged from both vessels and the *Ontonagon* was pulled of the bar on December 7, 1853, but the *Palestine* was abandoned to break up on the shore. Oddly enough, the same thing had happened in the same place to two other iron-laden vessels a few years earlier.

**Henry Clay**—This wooden, propeller steamer was built by Ruggles and Shupe at Milan, Ohio in 1849. Several other vessels with the name *Henry Clay* were built about the same time on the Great Lakes: a sidewheel steamer in Black Rock [Buffalo, New York] (1825); a schooner at Oswego, New York (1831); and a brig at Huron, Ohio (1842), which causes some difficulty in tracing the history of the one built in Milan that Captain Aaron Root owned and operated from 1849 to 1851. The Milan *Henry Clay* was the only propeller steamer in the group and the only propeller vessel known to be operated by Captain Root. This steamer, when launched known as the *Erie*, was originally built as a 221-ton vessel with a length of 107 feet, beam of 23 feet, and depth of 9 feet. She was towed to Cleveland where her steam engine and other machinery were installed by the Cuyahoga Manufacturing Co. Within two years, Captain Root was instrumental in having the vessel rebuilt by William Jones at Black River in 1851, with new dimensions of 316 tons, length 134 feet, beam 23 feet, and depth 11 feet. She operated mainly as a passenger and package freighter on the lower Great Lakes.

The famed *Sandusky Platter*, a Staffordshire blue china platter produced circa 1835, contains an image of a sidewheel steamer named *Henry Clay* in Sandusky Bay in front of the city. This vessel is often confused with the propeller steamer *Henry Clay* built in Milan in 1849. The vessel pictured on the platter is most likely the *Henry Clay* built in Black Rock [Buffalo, New York] in 1825. Three of these rather rare platters are known to be on display in Ohio: (1) Milan Historical Museum, Williams Collection, (2) Sandusky Library, and (3) Ohio History Center, Columbus, Ohio.

The *Henry Clay* met her end on October 24, 1851 when she foundered in Lake Erie off the tip of Long Point, Ontario. At the time of sinking she was owned by Captain Aaron Root, Captain George Callard, and G. W. Holt, and her



*Sandusky Platter depicting the sidewheel steamer Henry Clay in Sandusky Bay, circa 1835 (courtesy of Milan Historical Society). The vessel in this image is often confused with the propeller steamer Henry Clay owned by Captain Aaron Root, built in Milan in 1849.*

master was Captain Callard. He was guiding her downbound from Detroit to Ogdensburg, New York carrying a cargo of flour in barrels, baled wool, and a few passengers. The ship encountered a severe gale and as the vessel was tossed in the heavy seas some of the barrels crashed into the engine, finally breaking it. With her engine inoperable, the ship was unmanageable and at the mercy of mountainous waves that ripped her deck from the hull, taking 10 of the crew with it to their death. She continued to be battered by the waves, drowning all of the remaining crew and passengers except for a crewman who managed to survive by clinging to an inverted yawl until he was picked up by a passing schooner. In all, 16 people perished in the shipwreck when the *Henry Clay* went down about half a mile off the tip of the point. Her cargo is reported to have washed ashore for months after she was lost. Horses were used to work the deck gear on these early steamers, and today divers occasionally find horse bones on this wreck site.

**Wm. S. Pierson**—This bark [a sailing ship with three or more masts, all but the aftermast is square-rigged, it being rigged fore-and-aft] was built at the Cove in Sandusky, Ohio in 1859. The vessel was designed for sea service at the request of Wildman Mills, William S. Pierson, and Aaron Root. The vessel cost a reported \$16,000. The final disposition of this vessel is unknown, other than believed sold in Germany in the 1860s.

The May 19, 1858 issue of the *Sandusky Register* carried the following article on the launching of the *Wm. S. Pierson*:

*The barquentine built at the shipyard of Merry & Gay & Fordham was successfully launched yesterday afternoon. She glided gracefully into the water amid shouts of the multitudes who had collected to witness the sight. She is a perfect beauty! The length of her keel is 131' 5" (over all 143'), breadth 23' 10", depth 11' 10 1/2", and government tonnage about 392. Her keel, keelson, frame, deadwood [after part of the underwater hull where it is shaped into the rudder post], bilge strakes [course of planks at the sides and bottom of a hull], apron frame and stem [upright structural member forming the shape of the bow] are throughout of the best quality white oak and above the specifications for an A1 vessel in size and strength.*

*She has thick ceiling [interior planking affixed to a ship's hull], 4" scarfed and edgebolted and inverted arches 3 1/2" thick by 4' deep, into the top of which two hanging knees from every beam are mitered, and heavy shelf piece extending from stem to transom. Outside planks are 3" and 3 1/2" and the garboard strake [lowest strake on a vessel's hull that abuts the keel] are 4 1/2" x 18" and edgebolted*

to the keel. She has a watertight bulkhead at the forecastle [raised platform at the bow] and 4 breasthooks [horizontal, angled brace at the bow] each side 10". The waterway, most partners [reinforcing beams under the deck to lend strength and support where masts, capstans, and other deck structures and openings are located] and fife rail [heavily braced rail structure on deck at the foot of the mast for securing lines] are black walnut polished and varnished. Her bow is ornamented with a gilded eagle's head on the stem surrounded with gilded trail boards [panels at the bow of a sailing vessel to brace and decorate the base of the bowsprit], and her stern is adorned with the United States coat of arms for a center piece about which are two golden dragons and around the whole a wreath of stars.

The cabin is a poop cabin [high after-deck in the stern section of a vessel] with dining room finely finished and oak grained, and 6 fine staterooms, very pleasant, lighted and well furnished. The arrangements for cooking are complete. A more handsomely proportioned and perfect set of spars [masts, booms, and yards] is rarely seen. She has monkey rails [light-weight side rails] all around and is furnished in every way for sea service, and bolted and fastened in all respects equal to the specifications for an A1 vessel and, in many respects, superior. When loaded to 9 1/2' she will displace 63955/95 tons of water. She is perfect in every respect, very well found, having Talcott's patent capstan, Wilcoxin's patent steering gear and other modern improvements and tested chain and anchors of full weight for her need. Contractors of the work are Gay & Fordham, master builder George Fordham assisted by John E. Monk, rigger Neil McCallister, joiner W. B. Sly and caulker John Currier.

She will be commanded by Capt. A. Root and she is named after Mr. Pierson by his associated owners. The barque is

designed for the European trade and will sail as soon as cargo can be put board—which is now ready. Our citizens regard this vessel with pride on account of her superior workmanship, model, and material, the latter being of the best oak selected for the purpose, in which this vicinity abounds.



Model of ocean bark Wm. S. Pierson. This ship was sailed to England by Captain Aaron Root in 1859.



An early version of the Welland Canal from the mid-1800s. The Wm. S. Pierson passed these locks en route from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario and the Atlantic Ocean (courtesy of the Great Lakes Historical Society).

In August 1859 there was a note in the Sandusky Register that the Wm. S. Pierson had crossed the Atlantic Ocean—nothing more. However, the recollections of a crewmember on that voyage provide more insight. The History of the Day-Austin-Root August Reunions contains an interesting entry about the life of Frederic Oliver Day (1840-1921) and his ocean voyage aboard the Wm. S. Pierson. Frederic was born in the old Day home at the Center of Sheffield. There was much excitement and adventure in his life; he had sailed the Great Lakes for a number of years—having three narrow escapes from shipwrecks. Perhaps the most exciting experience was a voyage across the North Atlantic in 1859 with his uncle, Captain Aaron Root. They sailed the Wm. S. Pierson from Lorain to Liverpool, England via an early version of the Welland Canal. Forty locks were then necessary to negotiate the 326-foot drop from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario. Captain Root had hired a navigator from England to guide them across the sea with a cargo of lumber for

gunstocks and barrel staves. The trip over was prosperous and successful, but once in England the navigator decided not to return in America. The ship continued on to Germany, taking on a cargo of cheese before recrossing the ocean. The return trip was stormy and in mid-ocean the ship sprung a leak. The crew had much difficulty mending it and bringing the ship safely into New York harbor, much delayed. At sea, provisions had run low, so hunger and thirst were added to the hardships of the crew. Thankfully the cargo of cheese proved a blessing. Two years later Frederic Day entered the U.S. Army and served the entire Civil War with the Illinois Light Artillery where he won high praise as an expert gunner.

**Esther (Buck) Root (1811-1872).** Captain Aaron Root's voyages took him to the Huron and Milan area where he met Almon Ruggles and his family. Ruggles, a native of Brookfield, Connecticut and the surveyor of the Firelands, settled on the lakeshore between the Vermilion and Huron Rivers at what came to be known as Ruggles Grove. For many years he acted as land agent for the Firelands Society. In taking partial compensation for services rendered, he was granted one section of land, where he built the Ruggles farmhouse in 1825. He was chosen as the first recorder when Huron County was organized in 1809 and was appointed associate judge in 1815. Later he was elected State Senator (1816 & 1818) and State Representative (1824). The first Vermilion Township meeting was held at his residence in April 6, 1818. Judge Ruggles' extended family is important to the history of Sheffield, especially to the Root brothers, Aaron and William, by virtue of his stepdaughters Esther Buck and Sara Eliza Case.

Esther Buck's mother, Rhoda (Sprague) Buck was first married to Alexander Case (1779-1808) and she bore three children: Harlow (1804), Lyman (1806), and Sara Eliza (1808). When he died, Rhoda married Captain Andrew Buck (1776-1815) and from that union Esther was born in 1811. When Esther was four years old, her father died. Her mother then married Judge Almon Ruggles in 1816 and they lived on the lakeshore at Ruggles Grove. In 1808, Judge Ruggles had married Annie Dibble and they had two daughters, Rebecca and Betsy, but Annie died in 1815. Almon Ruggles and Rhoda Buck had two sons, Charles (1818) and Richard (1827). Thus, by the 1820s the Ruggles family consisted of Almon, his wife Rhoda, with four different sets of children. They apparently all lived quite happily together, as evidenced by the fact that



*Judge Almon Ruggles farmhouse on the Lake Erie shore between Huron and Vermilion, where Esther Buck, Capt. Aaron Root's wife, spent her childhood after her widowed mother married Judge Ruggles (courtesy of Firelands Historical Society).*



*Aerial view of the west branch of Old Woman Creek near Berlinville in Erie County, Ohio. In the late 1840s and 1850s Captain Aaron Root made his home here raising cattle.*

Lyman Case married Rebecca Ruggles. In 1828, two of Almon's stepdaughters married brothers from Sheffield—Esther Buck married Captain Aaron Root and Sara Eliza Case married William H. Root (1803-1889).



*St. Teresa of Avila Catholic Church on the northwest corner of Abbe Road and Colorado Avenue. Captain Aaron Root sold land for this church and cemetery to the parishioners in the 1840s.*

### **Captain Aaron Root and the Abolitionist Movement.**

Aaron was strongly opposed to the practice of slavery. As a Great Lakes captain in the mid-1800s, he was an important link in the Underground Railroad by transporting runaway slaves on his ships. Aaron maintained warehouses along the Black River in Charleston [Lorain], which served as a staging area for concealing runaways aboard his ships. His deeds in this regard are recognized on two Ohio Historic Markers in Lorain County. Placement of the Markers at the Burrell Homestead in Sheffield Village and at the Underground Railroad Station 100 near the mouth of the Black River in Lorain commemorates the roles of two Sheffield men, Robbins Burrell and Captain Aaron Root, in the transport of escaped slaves to freedom in Canada in the 1850s. One at the Burrell Homestead on East River Road in Sheffield Village and the second at the mouth of the Black River in Lorain:

#### **BURRELL HOMESTEAD**

*In June 1815, Captain Jabez Burrell settled this land after coming from Sheffield, Massachusetts. Five years later the brick homestead was constructed. Five generations of the Burrell family occupied the homestead continuously from 1820 to January 2001 when Eleanor B. Burrell passed away. In 1836, the racially integrated Sheffield Manual Labor Institute, a branch of Oberlin College, was established at the Burrell Homestead, but the Institute closed the next year because the Ohio Legislature refused to grant its charter unless it excluded black students. From 1837 until the start of the Civil War, the homestead was a major stop on the Underground Railroad. Runaway slaves were hidden in the grain barn until Robbins Burrell could arrange for captains in Lorain, such as Aaron Root, to hide them on vessels for the trip across Lake Erie to freedom in Canada.*

**THE OHIO BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION  
THE P&G FUND  
THE OHIO HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

## LORAIN STATION 100

Prior to the Civil War, Ohio was a leading state for enslaved Americans of African descent traveling the Underground Railroad to freedom in Canada. For these fugitives, their final stop in Ohio was a Lake Erie port community in the north. One

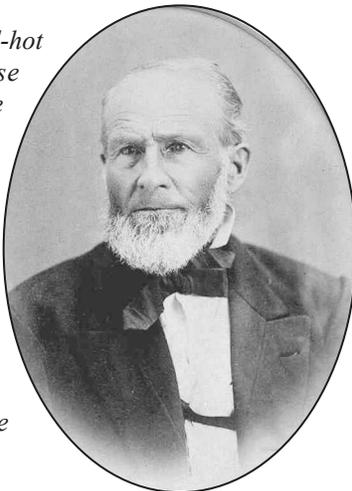


such port was at the mouth of the Black River in Lorain that came to be identified as Lorain Station 100, named because it was thought to be one of the last stops or stations before the fugitive slaves reached freedom in Canada. Many arrived here in a wagon driven by Robbins Burrell who owned a farm five miles up the Black River. Concealed by vegetables, grains, or hay, the slaves were smuggled into schooners, some of which belonged to Burrell's cousin Captain Aaron Root. From Lorain Station 100, the determined travelers were transported across Lake Erie, completing the final leg of their journey to freedom.

Ohio Historical Marker for the Lorain Station 100 on the Underground Railroad. This marker is located at the Bascule Bridge, near the mouth of the Black River. Captain Aaron Root's warehouses, which he used to sequester runaways until they could be taken aboard his ships, were located in this vicinity.

Robbins Burrell, proprietor of the Burrell Homestead in Sheffield Center, was a close friend and confidant of Captain Aaron Root. Prior to the Civil War they shared a strong distaste for the notion of slavery. Working together they managed to smuggle many a runaway slave to freedom in British Canada. The following excerpt from Robbins obituary, written by his son Edward for the August 25, 1877 edition of the *Elyria Republican*, documents their collaboration:

From the first he was a red-hot anti-slavery man. His house was for years a station on the underground railroad, and many a fugitive slave from Kentucky who had reached Oberlin, was smuggled to him, concealed until Capt. Root reached the nearest port, and then set across the lake. He believed in "the higher law" heresy, and would have gone to prison or the stake before he would have added in the return of a slave. Many a time lordly Kentuckians, with spurs, pistols, whips and hounds, visited his place in search of fugitives, and to "help them hunt" put them on the wrong trails, let them ransack improbable places, peek into holes, and devil and laugh at them, was delightful to him. It was just the mischief and adventure he craved.



Robbins Burrell (1799-1877), a close friend of Captain Aaron Root, operated a station on the Underground Railroad at his homestead in Sheffield Village.

### Captain Root's Final Years.

After returning from his dramatic voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, Captain Root decided he had had his fill of life on the sea. He purchased a sizeable farm near the Indiana-Illinois border. Here he and his family spent the early years of the Civil War. His son, Edward, enlisted and rose to the rank of Sergeant with the Indiana Volunteer Infantry. A letter from Aaron's daughter, Emma (Root) Reeves, indicates that she was at her father's home in Kankakee County, Illinois when her brother, Edward Root, returned from the Union Army in January 1862, suffering a severe case of dysentery. In February 1863 Captain Root's son, Charles Root, writes that his father's farm was located on West Creek, Lake County, Indiana. Tax records for Lake County, Indiana indicate that Aaron owned 94 acres of land in Township 31 with a herd of 151 cattle and 120 acres in Township 32 with no cattle. Taxes on this property were \$30.17. As the Civil War came to a close, Captain Root moved back to Sheffield, Ohio to be closer to his children's families. He and Esther took up residence in the Douglas Smith House on North Ridge.

On September 13, 1865 Captain Aaron Root died at age 64 of dysentery. He was buried in the Aaron Root Plot at Garfield Cemetery, a short distance from the Smith House where he passed away. In recognizing his exemplary career, *The Marine Record* reported: "Captain Aaron Root, a pioneer lake man commanding several steamers and vessels, died at Black River."

Aaron's wife, Esther (Buck) Root, died on February 18, 1872. She was buried next to her husband in Garfield Cemetery. Other burials in the Aaron Root Plot include several of his children, their spouses, and his grandchildren.



Douglas Smith (1799-1862) built this house in 1833 on North Ridge in Sheffield Village. Captain Aaron Root spent his final years here, dying on September 13, 1865 at age 64.



Captain Aaron Root's gravestone in Garfield Cemetery on North Ridge in Sheffield Village. His wife, Esther Buck Root, died in 1872 and was buried next to her husband.

## Captain Aaron Root Timeline

**1801**

**August 29**—Aaron born in Sheffield, Massachusetts to Henry and Mary (Day) Root.

**1809**

**August 31**—Colonel Aaron Root, Capt. Aaron Root's grandfather, dies in Sheffield, Massachusetts. On January 30, 1776, he was commissioned Lt. Colonel of the 1<sup>st</sup> Berkshire County Regiment and served in the Continental Army throughout the Revolutionary War.

**1816**

**February 15**—Henry Root family begins overland journey from Massachusetts to Township 7, Range 17 of the Connecticut Western Reserve.

**April 3**—Root family arrives at Lot 17 in what would come to be known as Sheffield Township.

**1818**

—First vessel built on the Black River, the wooden sloop *General Huntington*.

**May 1**—Congregational Church formed in Sheffield by 13 pioneers, including Aaron's father, Henry Root.

**1824**

**June**—Town of Sheffield organized by first act of the Lorain County Commissioners.

**July 10**—Inaugural Sheffield town meeting; officers elected—John Day, Trustee; Milton Garfield, Treasurer; and Jabez Burrell and Henry Root, Poor-masters.

**1825**

—Third boat built along Black River, *Young Amaranth*—Capt. Aaron Root of Sheffield later owns and serves as master of this vessel (1829-1831).

**1827**

**October 8**—Capt. John Day, Aaron's uncle, dies; buried in Sheffield Pioneer Cemetery on East River Road.

**1828**

—Capt. Aaron Root marries Esther Buck of the Judge Ruggles household in Huron, Ohio—they have nine children: Henry (b. 1830), Walter (b. 1832), Edward (b. 1834), Eliza (b. 1836), Alice (b. 1838), Charles (b. 1840), William (b. 1842), Emma (b. 1844), and Julia (b. 1848).

—Capt. Aaron Root owns and serves as master of schooner *Beaver* (1828-1830).

**1829**

**April 9**—Henry Root, Aaron's father, dies; buried in Sheffield's Pioneer Cemetery. Aaron assumes role as head of the Root family; makes his home on Lot 17 homestead.

**1830**

—Capt. Aaron Root and associates build the *Sheldon Thompson*, the first steamer constructed in Huron, Ohio

**1834**

**September 25**—A son, Edward, is born to Capt. Aaron and Esther (Buck) Root. Edward serves with the Union Army in the Civil War, Sergeant Co. I, 87<sup>th</sup> Regiment Indiana Volunteers. He marries

Julia Clarissa Garfield, daughter of Colonel Milton Garfield of Sheffield, in 1866. They have three children: Tempa Edith, George Graham, and Henry Garfield. Edward dies on August 8, 1897 after a long illness associated with his Civil War injuries.

—After living on the original lot for 18 years, Aaron Root moves his family to the lakeshore, purchasing the next farm to the east of William Root, near the foot of Root Road.

**1835**

—Joseph J. Hamblin builds the *North Carolina*, the 18<sup>th</sup> boat to be constructed along the Black River—a wood, 85-foot, two-masted sailing vessel. Capt. Aaron Root owns and serves as master of this vessel (1835-1838).

**1837**

**April 28**—New steamer *Bunker Hill* begins service with Capt. Aaron Root as commander.

**Late 1830s-early 1850s**

—Capt. Aaron Root transports runaway slaves aboard his ships to freedom in Canada.

**1838**

—Frederick Nelson Jones builds the *Lexington*, the fifth steamboat to be constructed along the Black River—Capt. Aaron Root of Sheffield owns and serves as master of this vessel (May-November 1838).

**1839**

**July 17**—Capt. Aaron Root, master of the steamboat *Lexington*, arrives with his vessel at the wharf of Richard Winslow & Co. in Cleveland, Ohio to take on passengers for a pleasure excursion to Mackinac Island and Sault Ste. Marie. A band is onboard to provide music for the excursion. Fare for the entire trip is \$10.

**1840**

**January 18**—A son, Charles, is born to Capt. Aaron and Esther (Buck) Root. Charles serves with the Union Army in the Civil War. He dies in May 1925.

—German migration from Bavaria into Sheffield begins with the arrival of John Forster and his family; Forster purchases 50 acres of land near French Creek from Capt. Aaron Root on which he builds a log house.

**1842**

**April 27**—British author Charles Dickens visits Ohio and books passage from Sandusky to Cleveland then on to Buffalo aboard a steamer, said to be Capt. Root's *Bunker Hill*.

**1845**

—German emigrants organize a Catholic church in Sheffield. Each member of the church pays one dollar toward the purchase of an acre of land from Capt. Aaron Root with the understanding that when he sells his farm he will donate another acre. The parishioners build a log church on the northwest corner Conrad and Bennett Roads [present day Colorado Avenue and Abbe Road] and hold first mass on June 2, 1846 in church they name in honor of Saint Teresa of Avila.

**1848**

—Capt. Aaron Root of Sheffield and his associates order the shipbuilding firm of Ruggles & Shupe in Milan, Ohio to build a 200-ton propeller driven steamship to be named the *Erie*.

## Captain Aaron Root Timeline CONTINUED

### 1849

—Capt. Aaron Root sells the western portion of his farm in Sheffield to John Kelling; keeps his word by donating an extra acre of land to the Catholic Church, on which Saint Teresa Cemetery is established.

—Capt. Aaron Root moves his family to a farm at Berlinville on the west branch of Old Woman Creek in present-day Erie County, Ohio; near Milan, where he serves as shipwright for the construction of the propeller steamer *Erie*.

**May 9**—Milan shipbuilders launch the propeller *Erie* and tow her down the Milan Canal to Huron, then downlake to Cleveland to receive her engines from the Cuyahoga Manufacturing Co.

**May 16**—Before the *Erie* is placed in service, the name of vessel is changed to *Henry Clay*; Capt. Root serves as master of this steamer for the next two seasons, making runs from Milan to Buffalo and return.

### 1851

—Sheffield Tax Map for 1851 shows that Aaron Root owns 100 acres of the 130-acre Lot 17 and 50 acres of Lot 31 along the lakeshore.

**October 24**—Capt. Aaron Root's propeller steamer *Henry Clay* founders in a storm off Long Point, Ontario. At the time, Capt. George Callard is master of the vessel. Sixteen crew members perish in the wreck including Capt. Root's cousin from Lorain, Orestes Root. Aaron sails to the wreck site in an attempt to recover Orestes' body.

—The loss of the *Henry Clay* and his comrades takes a financial and emotional toll on Captain Aaron Root and he does not return to the practice of maritime navigation until the end of the decade.

### 1854

**April 18 & August 19**—Capt. Aaron Root receives letters addressed to him at Berlin P.O., Erie County, Ohio.

**October 16 & November 20**—Capt. Aaron Root receives letters addressed to him at West Creek, Lake County, Indiana.

### 1856

**February 6**—Mary (Day) Root, Aaron's mother, dies at age 83. Burial is next to her husband, Henry Root, in Sheffield's Pioneer Cemetery.

### 1858

**January 16**—Capt. Aaron Root receives a Certificate of Membership, No. 17821, in the Cosmopolitan Art Association, New York, New York.

**May 19**—Bark *Wm. S. Pierson* is launched at the shipyards of Merry, Gay & Fordham at Sandusky, Ohio. The vessel, designed for ocean navigation, was ordered by Capt. Aaron Root and his associates Wildman Mills and William S. Pierson.

### 1859

—Capt. Aaron Root, accompanied by a local crew including Frederic O. Day, sails from Lorain to Liverpool, England aboard the *Wm. S. Pierson*. Trip over is prosperous and successful (August), but the return trip is very stormy. Cargo over consists of lumber for gunstocks and barrel staves, and the return is a load of cheese. In mid-ocean the ship springs a leak and with considerable difficulty in making repair the ship is finally brought to the American shore with much delay. The provisions run low, adding hunger and thirst to the hardships of the crew.

### 1862

**January**—Mrs. Emma (Root) Reeve, daughter of Capt. Aaron Root, writes to the Bureau of Pensions, U.S. Department of Interior on June 24, 1890 that in January 1862 she was at her father's home in Kankakee County, Illinois when her brother, Edward Root, returned from the Union Army after suffering a severe case of dysentery.

### 1863

—Tax records for Lake County, Indiana indicate that Aaron Root owns 94 acres of land in Township 31 with a herd of 151 cattle and 120 acres in Township 32 with no cattle.

### 1865

**September 13**—Capt. Aaron Root dies at age 64 of dysentery. He and his wife Esther are living in the Douglas Smith house [built in 1833] on North Ridge at the time of his death. Burial is in Garfield Cemetery in Sheffield.

—Esther (Buck) Root, dies on February 18, 1872 and is buried next to her husband in Garfield Cemetery.

## Society Organization

The Sheffield Village Historical Society is a charitable nonprofit 501(c)(3) and educational organization dedicated to discovering, collecting, preserving, interpreting, and presenting Sheffield's rich heritage. Membership is open to anyone who wishes to support the Society's mission.

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Society journals can be found on the Village of Sheffield, Ohio official website: [www.sheffieldvillage.com](http://www.sheffieldvillage.com) (click on the Sheffield Village Historical Society decal , then Pioneer newsletters, then download). Page Layout is by Ricki C. Herdendorf, EcoSphere Associates, Put-in-Bay, Ohio.

The collections of the Sheffield Village Historical Society are housed in the Sheffield History Center at 4944 Detroit Road. The History Center is open to members and guests most Tuesdays 11:00 am-2:00pm and Thursdays 6:00 pm-8:00 pm or by appointment—please call Kathy Yancer (216-543-3651). The next meeting of the Board of Trustees is **April 11, 2013, 7:00 pm at the History Center. All members are welcome to attend this meeting.**

Society members are encouraged to submit items for future issues. Please send your stories or ideas to the Editor.

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